DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 036 707 AC 006 417

AUTHOR	Pfeiffer, J. William; Sabers, Darrell
TITLE	Attrition and Achievement in Correspondence Study.
INSTITUTION	National Home Study Council, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Feb 70
NOTE	2p.; National Home Study Council News, Febraury 1970 Supplement
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.20
DESCRIPTORS	*Assignments, *Correspondence Study, *Dropout Research, *Grade Point Average, *Persistence

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the problem of why many students enrolling in correspondence study do not complete the course. In the one-semester-hour courses nearly 13% of students did not submit even one lesson. The figures for the two- and three-hour courses were both over 20%. In the four-hour courses, nearly 32% do not submit the first lesson. A student in a one-hour course who submitted one lesson had an 85% chance of completing the course. Of students in two- and three-hour courses who submitted one lesson, over 70% went on to complete the course. Grade point averages (GPA) were not related to length of time taken to complete the course. The highest GPA's were earned by those who completed in one month; the next highest were earned by those who took over two years to complete the course. However, since this latter group comprised 13 students, no significance can be attributed to the finding. (nl)

EDO 36707

NATIONAL HOME STUDY COUNCIL NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 1970 SUPPLEMENT

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Attrition and achievement in correspondence study

by J. William Pfeiffer and Darrell Sabers

Dr. Pfeiffer is now Assistant Director for Educational Resources, Indiana Higher Education Telecommunication System. At the time this study was made, he was a Research Associate at The University of Iowa. He received his B. A. degree from the University of Maryland and his Ph.D. degree from The University of Iowa.

Dr. Sabers is Assistant Director of the Bureau of Educational Research and Service at The University of Iowa. He received his B.S. degree from Dakota State College, his M.A. degree from Adams State College, and his Ph.D. degree from The University of Iowa.

It has long been recognized that many students enrolling in correspondence study do not complete a course of study. Different reasons have been hypothesized for the low completion rate. Among these reasons are the following:

1. The student enrolls with the intention of gaining a small amount of information about the subject (attaining a minimal level of competence) and realizes his goal before completing the course of study.

2. The student is enthusiastic enough to enroll but does not have the self-discipline to regularly assign time for study.

3. The student becomes discouraged at the slow process of the instructor's grading of his paper or by the instructor's remarks on his lesson.

4. The student is discouraged by the apparent magnitude of the course and decides the amount of work involved is too much or will be too difficult. In this case, the student does not begin to submit lessons.

An analysis of the attrition in correspondence study courses was made to determine at what point in study most dropouts occur. This report presents data collected on correspondence study courses for a two-year period at the University of Iowa. As indicated in Table 1, the per cent of students who complete each number of lessons was compiled for each category of one-, two-, three-, and four-semester-hour courses.

Table 1 indicates that the problem lies not so much in the attrition, or gradual decrease in lessons submitted, as in the failure to begin submitting lessons. In the one-semester-hour courses, 13 per cent of the enrollees do not submit even one lesson. In the four-hour courses, nearly 32 per cent do not submit the first lesson. The figures for the two- and three-hour courses are both over 20 per cent.

Once the student began to submit lessons, the chances were relatively good that he would complete the course. A student in a one-hour course who submitted one lesson had an 85 per cent chance of completing the course. Of students in two- and three-hour courses who submitted one lesson, over 70 per cent went on to complete the course. It is easily seen that students who complete two to four lessons have an excellent rate of course completion.

Each correspondence study course at the University of Iowa is designed to have eight lessons for each credit hour. Thus, as a unit of measurement, one lesson should have approximately the same meaning in a one-hour course as in a two-, three-, or four-hour course. It must be recognized, however, that some courses are easier for an individual than are other courses.

Table 1
Number and Per Cent of Students Who Completed No More Than A Given Number of Lessons by Type of Course

Total Students Who Have Completed:	1 s.h. Course		2 s.h. Course		3 s.h. Course		4 s.h. Course		Total	
Lesson	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
00	27	13.0	200	22.6	1051	20.3	84	31.9	1362	20.8
01	12	5.8	41	4.6	182	3.5	19	7.2	254	3.9
02	4	1.9	28	3.2	133	2.6	12	4.6	177	2.7
03	4	1.9	19	2.2	111	2.1	9	3.4	143	2.2
04			15	1.7	105	2.0	9	3.4	129	2.0
05	1	.5	13	1.5	81	1.6	12	4.6	107	1.6
06			12	1.4	83	1.6	6	2.3	101	1.5
07	3	1.5	5	.6	67	1.3	1	.4	76	1.2
08	156	75.4	17	1.9	59	1.1	5	1.9	237	3.6
09			9	1.0	47	.9	3	1.1	59	.9
10			8	.9	41	.8	5	1.9	54	.8
11			8	.9	37	.7	5	1.9	50	.8
12			5	.6	42	.8	3	1.1	50	.8
13			5	.6	14	.3	3	1.1	22	.3
14			9	1.0	15	.3			24	.4
15			9	1.0	15	.3	2	.8	26	.4
16			480	54.4	24	.5	2	.8	505	7.7
17					12	.2	2	.8	14	.2
18					16	.3	1	.4	17	.3
19					15	.3			15	.2
20					9	.2			9	.1
21					8	.2			8	.1
22					15	.3			15	.2
23					63	1.2	3	1.1	66	1.0
24					2941	56.7	4	1.5	2946	45.0
25							1	.4	1	.0
26										.0
27							2	.8	2	.0
28							1	.4	1	.0
29							2	.8	2	.0
30							3	1.1	3	.0
31							2	.8	2	.0
32							62	23.6	62	1.0
	207		883		5186		263		6539	

A 006 417

Table 2

Grade Point Average of Students by Number of Months to Complete a Course

# of Months	Students		
	N	%	GPA
1	103	1.4	3.15
2	456	6.3	3.02
3	540	7.5	2.94
4	343	4.8	2.99
5	288	4.0	3.04
6	225	3.1	2.88
7	225	3.1	2.88
8	177	2.5	2.96
9	164	2.8	2.96
10	165	2.3	3.07
11	202	2.8	2.84
12	207	2.9	2.97
13	93	1.3	2.89
14	75	1.0	3.08
15	46	.6	2.89
16	41	.6	3.02
17	73	1.0	2.97
18	170	2.4	2.98
19	129	1.8	2.96
20	47	.6	3.06
21	9	.1	2.78
22	4	.1	2.25
23	5	.1	2.80
24	4	.1	3.00
24+	18	.2	3.11
Average			2.97

The results of the study seem to indicate that of the reasons hypothesized for student failure to complete correspondence study courses, the most logical explanations are those dealing with the failure of the student to begin submitting lessons. This may result from enrollees' erroneous ideas as to the difficulty of the course, or it could be that the manuals are (or appear to be) more difficult than they need be. Which of these is the best explanation cannot be determined from these data, but would require another type of investigation.

Since many students complete a correspondence study course in a semester or less while others take over two years to finish, it was desired to determine the relationship between rate of completion and excellence of work. It was found, as reported in Table 2, that there is very little difference between the marks assigned to those students who complete their work early and to those who take more than five months to finish a course.

It had been felt that there was a tendency for superior students to finish their work in less time than other students, and thus the better marks would be assigned to those completing the course early. Balancing this, however, may be the fact that the student who hurries through his work does not do as good a job as he could do if he spent more time on each lesson.

Oddly enough, the highest grade point averages (GPA's) were earned by those who completed in one month; the next highest were earned by those who took over two years to complete the course. However, since this latter group is composed of only 13 students, no significance can be attributed to this finding. Also, since the former group is composed of a large proportion of students in the one-hour courses and no students in four-hour courses (where the highest GPA's are earned), we may be certain that students completing the course earlier have a tendency to receive the higher marks. (Additional analyses, comparing the mean GPA for students finishing in the first five months with other students, have verified this.)

Table 3 presents a summary of the marks earned for each type of course. It is, perhaps, surprising to find that the lowest GPA's are earned in the one-hour courses, where the completion rate is highest. Also, the highest GPA's are found in the four-hour courses, where the completion rate is lowest. This may not be as strange as it appears at first glance, although it differs from what one might expect from on-campus courses. In correspondence study, a student has a good deal of time to work his way through a course and has no pressing deadline at which to decide whether or not to drop the course. Some of the withdrawals may, in fact, be alternatives to receiving a low mark in the course.

Table 3

Number and Per Cent of Students Receiving Each Final Mark

Totals	1 s.h. Course		2 s.h. Course		3 s.h. Course		4 s.h. Course		All Courses	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	35	16.9	112	12.7	672	13.0	27	10.3	846	12.9
B	75	36.2	291	33.0	1582	30.5	20	7.6	1968	30.1
C	44	21.2	72	8.2	668	12.9	17	6.5	801	12.2
D			8	.9	54	1.0	4	1.5	66	1.0
F					12	.2			12	.2
W	53	25.6	400	45.3	2198	42.4	195	74.1	2846	43.5

ERIC Clearinghouse
FEB 20 1970
on Adult Education

Published by the National Home Study Council
1601 - 18th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009